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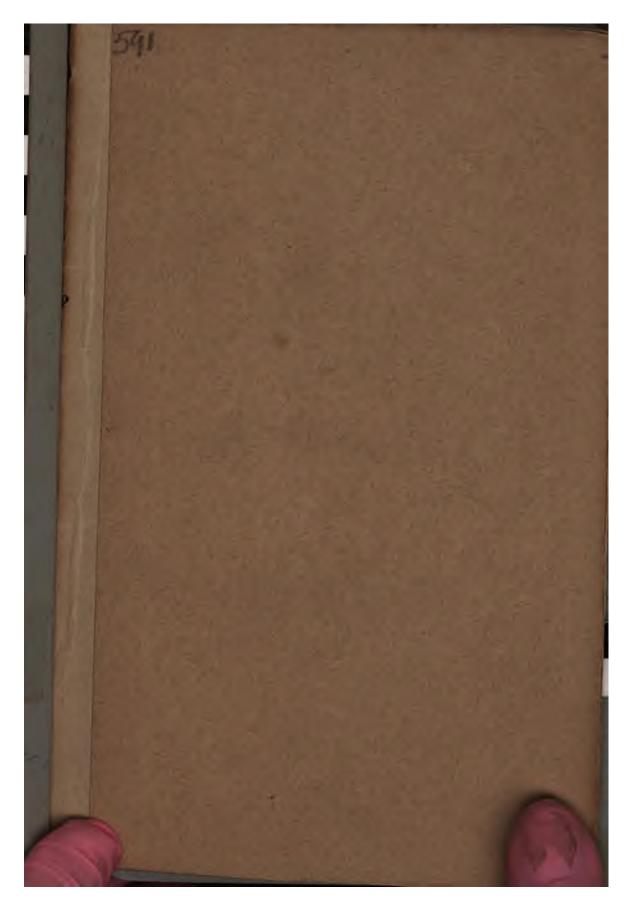
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LETTER,

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Evangelical Preaching.

(COMMONLY SO DENOMINATED:)

15

ITS CHARACTER: ERRORS: AND TENDENCY

IN A

LETTER

TC

THE RIGHT REVEREND

THE LORD BISHOP OF BATH AND WELLS:

BY THE

REV. RICHARD WARNER, F.A.S.

HON. MEM. OF THE IMP. CÆSAR. SOC. OF NAT. HIST. MOSCOW; AND OF THE DUTCH SOC. OF SCIENCES, HARLAEM; AND RECTOR OF GREAT CHALFIELD, WILTS, AND OF CROSCOMBE, SOMERSET.

Ea si vera sunt, ingenue fateor ingenii mei tarditatem, qui non assequor; certè sciens non reluctor veritati, et ex animo faveo libertati vere evangelicæe et detestor quicquid adversatur Evangelio. Eras. de lib. Arbit.

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A LETTER,

&с.

Chelwood House, Somerset, May 17th, 1828.

My Lord,

EARNEST and indefatigable as your Lordship is universally acknowledged to be, in promoting the cause of true religion, and practical piety: in exciting philanthropy into activity; and stimulating charity to "labours of love:" and, laudably zealous as you are, for the recognition and diffusion, by the Clergy of your diocese, of the sound, sober, and scriptural principles of that Church, with which both your Lordship and themselves, are, in different relations, so intimately connected: it seems to be unnecessary, that I should offer any apology to your Lordship, for the Letter which I have now the honour to present to your notice.

I cannot doubt, indeed, that, independently of introduction or excuse, its *object* alone, will be accepted by your Lordship, as its passport to your

attention: since it points to an evil, of vast and increasing magnitude, in that CHURCH-ESTABLISH-MENT, which is so deservedly dear to your Lordship; and, whilst it fearlessly pourtrays the nature of this spiritual anomaly, and displays its probable injurious effects, on the minds and morals of the members of that Establishment; takes the liberty of hinting, with equal openness, though with all due humility, at the means which appear to be the best calculated to arrest its progress in the present, and to obviate the deplorable consequences, which would follow its further extension, in future.

It is unnecessary for me to remind your Lordship, that, of late years, a strange alteration has been effected, in the usual style of public religious instruction, by a large body of the Church-of-England Clergy—that, this new system of preaching, is called, (with singular inconsistency) EVAN-GELICAL PREACHING—that, its wide popularity is unequivocal—and that, the Ministers who have not adopted it; who have not "forsaken the fountain of living waters; and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water;" are rapidly losing ground, in general estimation, and pastoral influence. In truth, my Lord, it is creeping, like a mist, over the whole surface of the country; and bearing with it, all the properties of a noxious fog: dimning the mental vision,

and obscuring the moral perception, of the people: shrouding the most important truths, under a veil of "thick darkness;" and magnifying non-essential matters, far beyond their due and natural proportions. That few districts exist, into which it has not found its way, is sufficiently notorious: and they who are best acquainted with the present theological character of our cities, (more especially of the two large ones in my own immediate neighbourhood,) will not deny, that, in these great masses of population, its adoption is considerable, and its patronage powerful and undisguised.

That this style of spiritual teaching has something wrong in it, may fairly be inferred, not only from its novelty, (for, in such cases, new and erroneous, are, usually, synonymous terms) but, also, from the variance of its views, and the discordancy of its spirit, with the pulpit instructions, of the holiest, wisest, and most learned divines, of the Church of England, from the æra of the Reformation, to the middle of the 18th century. "giants" who laboured in the vineyard of the Lord, in the days of the second Charles; William; Anne; and the two first Georges; " mighty in the Scriptures," and intimately conversant with the nature of fallen man, as a rational and responsible being; aimed to convince his understanding. and affect his heart, by clear reasoning; soher

argument; and touching exhortation: and, aware of his natural propensity to sin, and reluctance to holiness and virtue, from the violence of his passions, and the waywardness of his will; they were ever careful to place his duties, as a creature and a Christian, and his moral obligations, as a subject and a citizen; a husband and father; a neighbour and friend, in the most striking and prominent light; and to invite him to their performance, by "the mercies," and deter him from their infraction, by "the terrors of the Lord." their great Prototype St. Paul, indeed, they propounded the simple and essential points of Christian faith, with perspicuity and precision; and announced them as the only basis, on which Christian virtue could be built; but, like him, also, they constantly raised on this solid foundation. the beautiful superstructure of "good works;" defining the nature, and enforcing the obligation, of individual and personal righteousness, with a compleatness that left nothing untouched; with a clearness that could not be mistaken; with a power which it was difficult to resist. The glories of heaven, and the sorrows of perdition, were unfolded by them, not to inflame the fancy, or terrify the imagination of the hearer, but, as motives to moral obedience; and the enjoyment of the one, and an escape from the other, I repeat, depended, in their scriptural representation of the

terms of the Gospel covenant, on man's fulfilment of the three indispensable conditions of salvation; repentance for past transgression; Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ: and earnest endeavours to obey the precepts of his law.

Such, as your Lordship full well knows, was the spirit and form, of the pulpit exhortations of our most powerful Divines, for upwards of a century: and, since they have passed away, many, who caught their mantle; and many, who now tread in their steps, earnestly asserted, and still continue to hold out, to their congregations, the same scriptural views of the nature of the Gospel covenant; to preach, like them, the indivisibility of faith and practice; and to present fully to the minds, and urge home upon the consciences of their flocks, the importance of the precepts, as well as the doctrines of the Holy Scriptures.

But, how dissimilar, my Lord, to this apostolical and edifying system of public spiritual teaching, is the style adopted by that new and numerous class of Church-of-England Divines, who, either by assumption or nomination, are known as *Evangelical Preachers!* The contrast between the two is manifest, as that of light from darkness: the distance great,

" As from the centre to the utmost pole."

To attempt a minute and correct description of

the character of Evangelical preaching, weal, perhaps, be rather an ardnous undertaking; since it assumes a strange diversity of aspects, according to the peculiar views or temperaments of the ministers who practise it. Made up, for the most part, of subtleties and refinements; of human funcies, and vain imaginations; it cludes the grasp of the understanding; and, like an elastic gas, refuses to be reduced to any sensible substance, or definite form.

By some of these Divines, the appalling dogmas of Culvinism, are preached in all their grossness. In their hideous picture of the scheme of redemption, the "God of love" stands out from the canvas, (proh nefas!) an arbitrary and vindictive tyrant: and man, free in his will, and accountable for his actions, is discovered, in the back-ground, a mere machine! With them salvation depends, not on the illimitable mercy of God shining upon, and embracing, impartially, all his rational and intelligent creatures—not on the mediation of Jesus Christ, who shed his blood for the propitiation of the sins of the whole world—not on the sinner's carnest yearnings and struggles after God's pardon and approbation, by repentance, faith, and obedience, rendered acceptable with the Most High, through the atonement of a crucified Saviour-but, on certain irreversible decrees, of personal election or reprobation, settled

in the Divine mind from all eternity; which, without the slightest reference to men's "moral doings;" to their degree of light; or means of knowledge; allot, to one individual, the future joys and glories of heaven; and to another, the inconceivable pains of that state, "in which the worm dieth not, neither is the fire quenched." A wretched scheme of Faith; which, cloathing its pestilent principles in miserable metamorphysics, covers "the ark" with cobwebs; and shrouds "the mercy-seat," from the gaze of the contrite sinner.

Others, of a gentler spirit, and a better taste, adopt, in their preaching, a milder form of the peculiar doctrines of the Genevan school. They present to their congregations, a moderate or philosophical Calvinism, (as it is called) a phantom less terrible, indeed, in appearance; but equally imaginary and unsubstantial, with the chimera just described. A vox et prætera nihil. A thing of unintelligible terms, and verbal niceties; which, could the mind apprehend, or the reason pursue it, would be found to reduce itself, at last, to this awful dilemma—either, man is irresponsible; or, the Divinity unjust.

Others, again, of this modern class of Church-of-England Clergy, delight to dwell on the perfect and unmixed malignity of human nature: describing it, as altogether, incapable of a holy

thought; a benevolent impulse; a generous emotion; or a worthy action. In their gloomy view of our corrupted race, Man, at the Fall, became one uniform mass of "defecated evil:" and "the image of God," in which his Maker had created him, was changed into the horrid semblance of a flend. Benumbed, and rendered utterly powerless, by the lapse of Adam, his offspring, (they tell us,) can do nothing in the work of salvation. (though we are expressly commanded to "work together with God,") but that an overwhelming grace, and the blood of the atonement, are to effect every thing, in our restoration to the favour and acceptance of the Almighty: thus paralyzing the energies of virtue: cheeking the struggles of piety; damping the ardour of benevolence; and extinguishing the spirit of Christian charity.

But, it would be an endless task, my Lord, to trace, through all their varieties, the specific differences of Evangelical preaching: for, umbrarum hic locus; it is a wilderness of shadows, infinitely diversified and fantastic in their figures; though all, in their nature, equally airy and indistinct. There are, however, two points, wherein all the Clergy of this school agree: which are quite sufficient to mark the preachers as a genus, and their mode of teaching as a system.

It is a fact too notorious to be denied, and one, which the ministers referred to, will not, probably, be disposed to contradict; that the usual, and almost exclusive theme of praise and recommendation, in their sermons, is: FAITH; which, like "the brazen serpent" in the wilderness, is lifted up, a conspicuous, but solitary object, for their hearers to "look thereon and live"—that, it is described, as the "Alpha and Omega," the beginning and end; the substance and essence, of vital religion: the certain pledge of salvation to the believer; the "one pearl of great price," to which, exclusively, is appended the guerdon of eternal life. The very phrase of "good works," as a condition of salvation, is not known in their theological vocabulary: and the utmost they will allow to moral virtue, when it claims their reluctant and accidental notice, is, that its only value in the sight of God, arises, not from its being a proof of religious obedience, but, merely, as it forms an evidence of faith. Fearful that man should build any claim of merit, upon any thing he can do himself, and plead his personal righteousness as a reason for God's acceptance of him, (though all such "boasting" is cut off, by the conviction of every serious Christian, that, after all, he is only an "unprofitable servant,") they oscillate into the contrary extreme, and, either by an actual disparagement of "good works," or, by their sullen silence respecting them, they rob religious and moral obedience of its legitimate honours: of

that value and approbation, in the sight of God, which He, in His mercy, is pleased, for the sake of Jesus Christ, to confer on every humble and sincere endeavour "to do his will:" and, to which he put his own seal, when, in the case of Cornelius, his angel said, "thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God."

The other general characteristic of evangelical preaching to which I have alluded, is this: its constant reference to Jesus Christ, as embodying in himself all the attributes; and exercising all the prerogatives; planning all the counsels; and effecting all the purposes, of God the Father; in direct contradiction to the express and repeated declarations of the Holy Saviour himself; and in opposition to the tenor of those Articles of our Church, with the violation of which, the Evangelical clergy are so apt to charge their brotherministers of the Establishment. What is this practice, my Lord, but destroying, (if I may say it without irreverence) the balance of the mystery of the Holy Trinity; overturning the equality of the persons; and giving exaltation to one, by lowering and degrading the others? In this exclusive adoration of Christ, the Paternity is utterly lost sight of: the dread "Majesty of Heaven:" the "King Immortal:" the "I Am that I Am:" the "First and the Last:" "the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth Eternity:" is, either

excluded entirely from the scene, or appears upon it, shorn of his ineffable glories, and cloathed with inferior honours: and the awful injunction of our blessed Lord himself, that "all men should honour the Son, as" (in like manner, or in the same degree) "they honour the Father," is infringed or neglected; in the vain hope, that a superior worship offered to his nature, will be accepted as a reparation for the breach of his commands.

From what I have already had the honour of submitting to your Lordship's notice, respecting the character of evangelical preaching; its errors will have been rendered far from equivocal. Truth will justify the repetition, that it is, altogether, a system of Pulpit instruction, without foundation in the Bible; without authority from the sound, and long-acknowledged principles of the Established Church; without examples, in the writings and discourses of our most esteemed, and most Orthodox Divines. Of its Calvinistic and methodistical peculiarities, it may be fairly. said, that, if they have any meaning at all, it is such an one, as conveys false and perverse ideas of the Christian Faith: notions entirely at variance with the simplicity of the Gospel scheme of salvation; and subversive of the very cornerstone of moral righteousness. They may amuse the imagination of those who listen to them ; or perplex, and perhaps, distract their minds, but, they have no bearing, upon Man's present improvement, or future well-being; for, however greedily imbibed, they cannot add a single particle to the recipient's piety or virtue here; nor produce any well-grounded hope of his happiness hereafter.

The exclusive eulogies and recommendation of faith, also, and the neglect of practical enforces ments in Evangelical preaching, is another of its glaring errors; to which may be applied, with the strictest propriety, the solemn admonition of Jesus Christ, to the angel of the Church of Ephesus: "I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience; and how thou canst not bear them which are evil-yet, I have somewhat against thee; because thou hast left thy first love:" for, assuredly, such a perverse scheme of popular teaching, is an absolute dereliction of that system of spiritual and moral instruction, which Moses and the Prophets, under the old covenant, and the Apostles and Preachers under the new one, were commanded to follow; and which it seemed good to the Saviour himself to adopt, for the edification and salvation of mankind. -- "This do and thou shalt live," is the perpetual language of the authorized teachers of the Mosaical dispensation: and one of the latest of the Jewish Seers, gives the tenor of the doctrines they taught, and

the precepts they enjoined, in this pregnant sentence; which, while it embraces the obligation of Faith. (or "walking humbly with God,") intimates the value, importance, and necessity of Practice, with equal clearness and force: "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" The fuller dispensation of "life and immortality," by Jesus Christ, was introduced into the world in language of the same practical The harbinger of the Saviour, John the import. Baptist, when he heralded the ministry of the Messiah upon earth, preached in the wilderness, and said, "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand-bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance." Our blessed Lord began, and prosecuted his labours, in the same spirit. his public exhortations and private discourses: his Sermon on the Mount, to "the multitudes;" and his conversations with his Disciples, apart: have a moral, as well as spiritual, character, They are invariably fraught with practical instruction; adapted to the improvement of the heart, and directed to the corroboration of the principles of virtue. That the preaching and writings of the Apostles, were of a similar description, will be denied by no man, who is conversant with either: for certain it is, that their enhorta-

tions to Christians, to labour after an increase and proficiency, in personal righteousness, are only less powerful, than the injunctions of their Lord and Master, to the same effect. himself, (as I have before hinted) the favourite Apostle of the Clergy of the Evangelical school, (because "he has some things hard to be understood" in his Epistles, and, therefore, easily "wrested" and perverted, to false conclusions) affords an example of practical teaching, which nothing short of judicial blindness can mistake. The commencement of his several Epistles, is, indeed, of a doctrinal cast; adapted to heal the divisions, and regulate the faith, of the different churches to which he wrote: but, no sooner has he settled the points in dispute, (a step of the utmost importance to the harmony, and, consequently, to the Christian virtue of the new believers,) than he proceeds to moral instruction: to wise and holy maxims, bearing upon the conduct of human life: to precepts, applicable to every rank and condition, to every age and character, in the great family of man; to a specification of the various virtues, which must be exemplified in the outward behaviour of those, who would adorn their Christian calling, and save their immortal souls.

It cannot be doubted, my Lord, that Evangelical preaching, opposed as it thus appears to be, to the practice of the Inspired Instructors of mankind, and of the Son of God himself; is not only inefficient to the promotion of true piety, moral virtue, and social happiness, but absolutely adverse in its tendency, to their establishment and. diffusion. Where, it may be asked, are the evidences of its beneficial operation on the morals. and welfare of our country, since its adoption and popularity among us? Has ambition been damped, or dissipation checked, in "the high and lofty ones?" Has fashion been shamed out of its follies, or the greediness of gain been cured of its: selfishness? Have the records of public offences in our cities, and of private inordinances in our families, become less voluminous; the number of criminals been diminished; or the list of the executed curtailed, within the last quarter of a century? Has "vice," in short, "been appalled in its high career;"

"And heedless, rambling impulse thought to think?"

Alas! my Lord, when we attentively regard the present *moral* aspect of our country, this melancholy conclusion must, I fear, be forced upon our minds—that, to whatsoever causes, an alarming *increase* of public crime and private profligacy may be attributed, no *improvement* in the national character hath, as yet, resulted from Evangelical Preaching.

It is not enough, however, my Lord, to regard the tendency of this system of pulpit instruction, in a negative light; we may, with verity, assert, that it is positively noxious; from its neglect of moral teaching; and from its holding out the visions of a bewildering faith, as the chief, if not only objects, worthy of the believer's notice. This point, I think, is made sufficiently clear, in a few observations which I ventured to offer to the public, on another occasion.

However dignified and gifted man might have been in his original state, created as he was, in "the image of God," and endowed with moral and intellectual; with physical and spiritual, excellence; yet, when he fell, his nature became debased; and his thoughts, desires, and propensities, took a bias towards "that which is evil." The fact is authenticated by revelation; and confirmed to every thinking man, by his own personal experience, and the slightest knowledge, and most cursory observation, of the characters and conduct of those around him. From all that he feels within, and all that he sees without, he is continually reminded of these humiliating truths,—that "we are all gone astray;" that there is "not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not:" that we

are creatures of wild and irregular desires; of false estimates, and perverted views; strongly inclined to follow wherever the will may lead, and to perpetrate whatever the passions may dictate; that we are surrounded, on all sides, by temptations, perpetually seducing us from our duty; by trials discouraging, and difficulties opposing, us, in the way of salvation. From these perverse tendencies. and unfavourable circumstances of fallen man, it necessarily follows, that the practice of moral virtue; the fulfilling of the law of righteousness; in other words, the steady exercise of "good works;" is, to all of us, a matter of considerable difficulty, and, to most of us, a point of almost unconquerable reluctance; so that, both high and low, rude and enlightened, are ever inclined to adopt any system which may be presented to them, as a substitute for the painful practice of the wide range of Christian duties; for the irksomeness of controlling impetuous passions, and overcoming impure desires; for the perpetual struggle of "keeping the body under," and "refraining the soul;" for the constant labour of subduing proud thoughts, and uncharitable dispositions; and performing the various obligations, of the father, the husband, the son, the brother, the neighbour, and the friend. Now, I contend, that the sermons and writings of the evangelical

Clergy actually put men in possession of this very desirable substitute; by making FAITH so constantly and emphatically the subject of their recommendation, and the theme of their praise. as unavoidably to impress the minds of the multitude, with the fatal notion, that this principle is not only the grand foundation (which no believer will deny) of the Christian character, but the sole material of which the structure is to be composed; thus leading them to imagine, that the moral graces of the Gospel are of no importance; that "good works" (so little or so contemptuously spoken of) are not a condition of salvation; and that, by natural inference, the restrictions of moral obligation may be dispensed with, and the deliberate infringement of relative, social, and personal duty (to which the depraved will of man is so unhappily directed) may, at the last great day of account, assure itself of a pardon, for the sake of that FAITH " which maketh whole." " To the pure," indeed, "all things are pure:" and God forbid! I should doubt, that my fellow-labourers alluded to, and many a holy man who attends their ministry, feel a deep and awful sense of the necessity of evidencing the sincerity of their belief, by all the lovely graces of a Christian life, and all the useful duties of a social state of being; but, still it may be insisted on, from the

very perverseness of our fallen nature; and from our proneness to catch at any thing as an alternative for moral obedience; that, in the great majority of mankind,—the ignorant, the busy, the worldly, and the indolent,—the preaching under consideration will "bring forth" very different "fruits,"—delusions of fancy, in the room of convictions of the understanding; excitations of feeling and passion, instead of impressions on the heart; and efforts of the imagination, rather than the energetic efforts of moral virtue.

"If these things be so," my Lord, (and, unhappily, their reality is but too well established,) it becomes a question of no trifling importance, how is the evil to be remedied? How are the erring preachers to be brought back to the simplicity of the Gospel; to "the truth as it is in Christ Jesus?" or, at least, how is the sober and scriptural Church of England, as by law established, to be protected from the further intrusion of ministers, who certainly do not propound to the people "the faith which was once delivered to the saints?" Far be it from me, my Lord, with an arrogance quite unbecoming my humble station and limited experience, to dictate the measures which should be taken for cure or preven-To that bench of Bishops, of which your Lordship is so distinguished a member, the constitutional and legal guardians of the purity of the doctrines of our Church, it exclusively belongs, to originate, deliberate upon, adopt, and execute them. But, waiving all such unwise pretensions on my part, I may, perhaps, stand excused for offering a few suggestions of my own mind upon the subject; though, doubtless, they are already present to the mind of every mitred Lord in Parliament, and, probably, have long influenced their Lordships, in the exercise of their high spiritual and episcopal functions.

Most happily, my Lord, the ordination of ministers for the Established Church, is entrusted to the hands of those who, from maturity of age, wide experience, scholastic acquirements, personal worth, and awful responsibility, may reasonably be supposed, not only to be perfectly conversant with the scriptural and edifying doctrines of that Church, but earnestly desirous also that these should be preached by the Clergy to its members in "simplicity and truth." Here, therefore, in this cautious and wholesome mode of supplying the ministry with stewards, there should seem to be a means of security provided against the "creeping-in unawares" of improper persons; of those whose spiritual views are in opposition to the truly evangelical and long-recognized principles of our venerable Pale. The estimate of their

qualifications, scholastic and moral, is, with the utmost wisdom, submitted to the Bishops: the test of their opinions also, speculative and practical, is to be proposed by their Lordships; and if these opinions be "found wanting" in scriptural authority, or tinged with enthusiasm, or deviating from common sense and universal reason; candour, assuredly, will readily allow, that such candidates ought not to be admitted into the ministry of the Established Church.

The remedy for the canker which is already within us, my Lord, may not, perhaps, be so manifest or easy as the means of obviating an increase of the disease: but still, the Church, if she have her "bane," is not altogether without her " antidote" also. The triennial visitations of the Bishops, constitute a noble engine for checking Evangelical Preaching, or counteracting its effects; for diffusing the "true light," and effecting the necessary regeneration of our unsound-The visitation Charges of their Lordships are not merely heard by their Clergy, but meet the eyes of multitudes of the Laity, in their wide circulation over the country through the medium of the press: and these Charges will, unquestionably, in the present most critical times, breathe the language of caution and admonition to the one, and of edification to the other. These, with-

out doubt, will tell the ministers of the Establishment generally, to feed the flocks committed to their care, with "the doctrine which is according to godliness;" not "doating about questions, and strifes of words," puffing up the preacher with conceit and self-sufficiency, and filling the hearer with spiritual pride, and all uncharitableness: and these will exhort the evangelical Clergy, particularly, to turn their attention from doctrinal subtleties to practical realities: not to waste their artillery in a petty warfare about shadows, with their brethren within the citadel; but to direct it against the enemies who are storming or sapping the outworks of our Zion, against the monster Infidelity, now marching with giant strides through the country, scattering from either hand the specious sophisms, and unsound, but dangerous, arguments of Deism: and against a corrupt Church, which insidiously, but incessantly, struggles to resume that spiritual domination, and regain those large possessions, which she formerly exercised, and enjoyed, in our own enfranchised land. And, finally, these will disabuse the people who may have been dazzled and led astray by Evangelical Preaching, by presenting to their view the unclouded Gospel, and the intelligible conditions on which its promises may be obtained; even by "adding to their faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to

knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly-kindness; and to brotherly-kindness, charity."

I have the honour to subscribe myself, with profound respect,

My Lord,

Your Lordship's

Most obedient humble servant,

RICHARD WARNER.

THE END.

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